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AUTHOR	Haywood, Bruce
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ABSTRACT

The role of private colleges is reviewed in light of the burgeoning system of public universities and colleges. Emphasis is placed on an overview of both public and private universities, the small college, and the humane college. (MJM)

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CRITIQUE

A Quarterly Memorandum

The Center for the Study of Higher Education

The University of Toledo

EDITORIAL OPINION

Higher education began in the United States when a small institution in New England set out to train young men toward the aim that:

> *Everyone shall consider the mayne End of his life and studyes to know God and Jesus Christ, which is Eternal life.*[1]

Admission requirements were clear:

> *When any Scholar is able to read Tully or such like classical Latin Author ex tempore, and make and speake true Latin in verse and prose, suo (ut aiunt) Marte, and decline perfectly the paradigms of nounes and verbes in ye Greeke tongue, then may hee be admitted into ye College . . .*[1]

And graduation requirements [illegible] concise enough that many of those members of today's "performance based instruction" school would indeed be happy:

> *Every scholar that on proof is found able to read the originals of the Old and New Testament into the Latin tongue, and to resolve them logically; withal being of Godly life and conversation; and at any publick act hath the approbation of the overseers and masters of the College, is fit to be dignified with his first degree.*[1]

Subsequently, however, following the 1700's, American higher education began to fluctuate in what it considered its goals. The results of all our fathers' rational discussions — and pure stubborn streaks — are a highly organized and widespread system of post-secondary institutions diversified, to be sure, but also amazingly similar to one another, on the whole, in goals and methods.

The curriculum has often been the center of our discussions as to whether or not we need to rethink what we are doing and how we are doing it. There were, you will recall, some startling "innovations" suggested during the first thirty or so years of the 19th century. But the Yale Report of 1828 did an effective job of returning us to the right course — "right," in the Yale faculty's majority opinion. But were they right, or did the "innovators" really see things as they needed to be seen in that day? Should we avoid the whole question and quip, "their day had not yet come." In many respects, we today are in a period that much resembles the 1820's.

This *Critique* shares with you the thoughts of Dr. Bruce Haywood. It represents, in at least this editor's opinion, one position worthy of serious attention by anyone involved in a liberal arts college. For behind all our financial dilemmas lies a core question that is often overlooked today: What are we in the liberal arts college doing today, and is it what we want to be doing?

W.F.H.

THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE 1970's

Bruce Haywood*

In what has already been labeled the "decade of crisis" for higher education, all private colleges face a struggle for survival against forces some observers think overpowering. The Carnegie Commission has forecast the death of several hundred colleges; those which do survive the decade may be much changed. The problem is more than the recurrent difficulty of falling income and rising

[1] records of Harvard College

* Provost, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio

costs. It is whether, in the face of a burgeoning system of public universities and colleges, the private college has any role to play in higher education.

I. The Universities, Public and Private

While various factors account for the remarkable growth of the public universities, there is one that eclipses all others. What has brought hundreds of thousands to their lecture halls is the quest for upward mobility, for the education (or merely the degree), that will admit them to a higher stratum of society. Seeking a social and economic breakthrough, successive generations have pressed for more years of formal education and have made "going to college" what once the high school diploma was. The barometers of social change forecast no drastic shifts of attitude in this regard. Indeed, the spread of "open admissions" policies suggests a stronger national commitment then ever to the dream of universal higher education. Despite those who urge our children to turn away from that dream — whether they be a Secretary of Labor who would rather see students learning skills in union-supported apprenticeships or extremists who see the universities as barriers to change — young people are not likely to reject higher education. Their goals are hardly to be approached on other paths. Some will find higher education wanting, of course, in whatever form it is presented to them, and some will question the goals to which it seems to point. Yet, all available evidence indicates, the vast majority of young people will look to higher education as the bridge to a society and a private life better than they now know. Crucial, then, to our understanding of what students will seek in higher education is our understanding of what they look to as the better.

Kenneth Keniston has warned us not to confuse two distinct forms of protests against the universities in the sixties. He has discerned two student revolutions: The demand of the "have-nots" (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and increasingly Poor Whites) that the university help them become "haves," and the rejection by the "haves" of the products of technological society, which results in their challenging a system of higher education seemingly devoted to values they do not cherish.

No single notion of higher education can satisfy the expectations of groups so different as those Keniston has identified. We cannot exclude from higher education, without betraying them, those who seek to move to middle-class state, on the grounds that higher education must now serve loftier ends. But neither can we sacrifice the moral and esthetic sensibilities of those whom the universities, out of a zeal to serve society's immediate goals, seeks to force into the mold of the useful citizen. Higher education can serve both, but only if we are willing to acknowledge that different needs dictate different forms.

A report recently prepared by a task force of the University of Massachusetts at Boston sets the priorities of that institution according to the needs of a middle-class society and those who would join it. Far from assigning to vocational schools training in useful skills, this university sees that as its prime activity, dignifying it by the awarding of the degree. Implicit in the report is the conviction that the university exists, not as society's critic or its best expression, but as its multitalented servant. That view, if one can judge from recent actions and announcements elsewhere, may well govern all definitions of higher education shaping the public universities in the decade before us.

We may reasonably expect the public universities of the seventies to have these characteristics: programs to meet the needs of a society increasingly defined by its technology, particularly the need for a large variety of technicians; concern for the current, for problem solving, and oriented, therefore, to the applied rather than the theoretical; responsiveness to political pressures, whether these take the form of alumni wishes for winning teams or of demands by special interest groups for particular degree programs; great accessibility in terms of "open admission," extension services, informal enrollment, and irregular patterns of attendance; an expanding notion of higher education wedded to the idea of social and economic betterment.

With all of this we must expect the public universities to move farther and farther away from traditional notions of the academic. Equally we can expect to see them drastically altering ideas of what may be counted as credit earned towards the degree. The assumptions which will rule the state-supported institutions will as easily admit credit for guided travel in Europe as for study there, for working with retarded children as for studying the causes of retardation, for evidence of possessing a skill as for the course of study by which it was obtained. We shall thus see the end of a tendency long apparent, with the degree being seen, not as a statement about a level of education attained to, but as a diploma certifying the mastery of certain readily measurable skills.

Ironically, this very process of broadening the scope of the university's work will inevitably be accompanied by a narrowing of its vision. In the end, the public universities will likely be most notable for its provincialism, the very enemy that higher education seeks to attack. There is immediate danger of this in the spreading efforts to exclude the out-of-state student and in the giving of preference to local concerns when the university's priorities are set. In a period of most severe competition for resources, the one axis of the universities will be favored only at cost to the other. Concern for the state and local will reduce interest in the national and international; emphasis on the now will diminish attention to the past and the future. Even if we assume reasonably strong support for most of the university's endeavors, the evidence of the relatively affluent years suggests which part of the universities is most likely to suffer benign neglect. The emphasis on professionalism, the preference for the departmental, the preeminence of centers for research — these will persist in a time of efforts to cut the costs of the university's operation. It will be undergraduate adademic education, most neglected now of the university's responsibilities, which will suffer most in the lean years. Few will care. Sadly it must be said that most of the current enthusiasm for the three-year A.B. springs less from the conviction that today's students are intellectually superior than from a sense that undergraduate education is mainly a waste of time, the component most readily dispensed with when ways are sought to reduce the time from first grade to the practice of law, medicine, or whatever.

It seems reasonable to assume that the shape of the public university in the future will be controlled by a dividing of its resources between graduate centers for research and undergraduate departments akin to those we know now in conservatories, engineering schools, and colleges of education. From present evidence there is little reason to believe that the shape of the private universities will be very different. Tempting as it is to believe that they might now try to define their role in terms of what the public institutions cannot or will not do, there is little likelihood of its happening. Indeed, the private universities seem lately to have taken the state universities as their model, reversing the old pattern. Some have seemed suicidally bent on trying to match the public institution's diversity of programs and professional schools. Some have described their goals and responsibilities which makes them indistinguishable from those of community colleges. Virtually all of them, in easier days, have been as guilty as any state university of neglecting their undergraduate academic center, the college of arts and sciences, in favor of other commitments. The reason is not difficult to determine. In the private universities as in the public, the decisions which control the kind and quality of undergraduate education are made by men whose first commitment is to the graduate and professional schools. For them the undergraduate program has no objectives of its own, no purposes except in terms of what comes next on the university's ladder. No private university has yet indicated that it will seek to change that order of things.

The public and private universities seem now like two ships sailing the same ocean, blown by the same winds, running against the same currents. They seek the same port, sail on the same schedule, carry similar passengers and crews. It is not obvious why passengers on the one are willing to pay the extra fare.

II. The Small Colleges

For those who have believed that the essential element in higher education is an academic form of undergraduate education, defined in its own terms, the small college has seemed the best vehicle for its accomplishments. Perhaps the most compelling support for this belief is to be found, ironically enough, in the efforts of large universities, when told that they must "do something" about undergraduate education, to create small residential colleges. It is not surprising that these sometimes noble efforts seem always to fail, for the college-within-the-university is ruled by forces which are finally hostile to its success. The disinterested observer might conclude that responsible liberal education, as distinct from training or instruction in subjects merely juxtaposed, is no longer possible in the large university.

Alas, that same detached observer might come to the same unhappy conclusion about many a small college, for the forces which have shattered the traditional center of the university have heavily damaged the small colleges. Today a college is likely to build its appeal to potential students on the secondary advantages to its size, rather than to find special academic virtues in smallness. Thus its catalogue will probably claim that "at X you get to know your fellow students . . . you are more than just a number . . . teachers know you as a person." Small colleges do well at a time when 27 per cent of all the students in the country are enrolled in sixty-five universities with student bodies of twenty thousand or over, to emphasize these advantages, especially in face of the naive brutality which so often characterizes the university's dealing with its members. By now, though, claims for a special sort of social

intimacy seem to have become the *sole* justification for the existence of many colleges. The academic fare they offer is almost a direct copy of the university's menu. They make no claim to provide an alternative mode of education. They seem to have lost sight of their real identity: an academic community, founded on the intellectual intimacy that grows between teachers and students devoted to the same ends.

An academic education seeks to engage students so powerfully with the world of ideas and the triumphs of the human spirit that these will provide the frame for all their living. Such engagement does not come out of dabbling with the trivial and peripheral, but out of earnest attention to the great and vital. It does not come out of training in "useful" skills or from preprofessional curricula. It happens only when an institution commits itself to developing thoughtful men and women. The small college has seemed uniquely suited to those ends, able to give itself altogether to the goals of academic education, uncompromised by commitments to graduate departments or to faculties of professional schools. The very name *college* goes back to a root which speaks to the interdependency of ideas and the interdisciplinary nature of liberal education, the only way of attaining to a coherent view of man's inquiries into his world and his own being.

How many colleges can today legitimately claim the name?

In our century, colleges have retreated from their true character, often yielding to the forces that eventually controlled the universities. As the university's graduate and research programs became increasingly prestigious, particularly after World War II, the faculties of small colleges took their university colleagues as models. The centrifugal forces which made university professors members only of departments, brought to the colleges pressures to fit the study of a subject, not to the work of the college, but to the national concept of the discipline. By the late fifties college faculty members were often so committed to a disciplinary identity that it was commonly argued that no college could hold on to a faculty unless it added graduate programs. Liberal education came to be thought of as merely preparatory to the "higher" education of graduate schools, not as higher education itself. For the past twenty years at least, a college which has laid claim to academic excellence has usually been suggesting that it is a better track to graduate schools than its neighbors.

Now, as colleges see their enrollments shrink while the universities' rise, they ask themselves what their role shall be, what they can do to survive. In the sometimes feverish quest for an identity, many have apparently decided to imitate the private universities — and thus imitate the public universities. One of Ohio's colleges proposes to provide three distinct curricula for its two thousand students, only one of them with an academic character. The president of another has urged abandonment of academic criteria for the admission or retention of students. A third seems determined to outdo the public institutions in crediting substitutions for academic work. Those colleges and others seem ready to grant that no definition of higher education can endure except that which the university has established. They seem already to be admitting that the small college can be nothing except the university on a more intimate scale.

If the small college is to survive, it must argue boldly and cogently an alternative to the university's shrunken vision of undergraduate education. It can have no other claim on society's attention. Given the university's tendency to give to every subject a technical character and preprofessional definition, the opportunity for the small college to provide an alternative seems obvious. We have already referred to those students who have come to look critically upon higher education because it seems to engage them only with the technical and narrowly specialized. Their number is by now legion. They are united by their sense of their colleges and universities having failed to afford them what they really seek: a moral and esthetic education. Very few colleges have sought to provide that rich alternative. We have set our priorities to serve the body of society rather than its soul.

Even more important than the existence of the small college for those who seek true liberal education is its survival as the vessel of the humane tradition. Without reference to that tradition, our society will find no solution to the problem that faces every technologically advanced society. Without allegiance to that tradition we may eradicate hunger, poverty, disease, and still fail. Our technology permits us now to endow hundreds of thousands of young people with skills that would have seemed fantastic in a previous age. We can fit them to ease pain, save lives, cure illness. And we can equip them at the same time to torture, to kill, to destroy. How shall we bring them to choose the one use of their skills over the other?

Our century provides monstrous examples of the evil that men trained, but not humanely educated, will perform. Let one illustration suffice. Nazi doctors during World War II carried out

bizarre experiments on Polish women, impregnating them artificially and then causing them to miscarry by such techniques as setting them in ice water. When charged with crimes against humanity, the doctors argued that they had been simply carrying on their work as scientists. They had done those things, not in the name of the Führer, not on behalf of Nazi ideology, not for a German victory, but in the pursuit of "knowledge for its own sake."

There is something utterly offensive, in the end, to a notion of education that celebrates "knowledge for its own sake." It is a justification frequently offered, nevertheless, for much that has gone on in our colleges and universities, the explanation most often given by those who have shut themselves off in a little corner of the academic world. Ironically, its dangers are matched only by that other view which influences so much of the university's activity today: the naive belief that higher education serves proper goals by developing skills and capacities in students, without concern for their uses. Again the poles of our present system emerge: at the one the commitment to undergraduate programs which do no more than equip young people to carry out certain functions; at the other, graduate research given to developing "knowledge for its own sake." The lack of a moral middle is painfully obvious.

An academic education for undergraduates is no guarantee that we shall cross that bridge to a better life. We may say soberly that it is our hope of having any vision of a better life. If we lose sight of the difference between educating doctors and training them, we shall have a world as lacking in moral principles as that created by Hitler.

III. The Humane College

It is easier to define the goals of liberal education than to describe confidently how they shall be attained. Those goals, moreover, have been pushed into the background by concern for more immediate matters. It is true that the great social problems of our time — urban blight, poverty, crime, disease, racial discrimination — lend themselves to analysis and treatment by methods which have little to do with liberal education. Yet if these problems are to be understood — the prerequisite to their being solved — we must come to them on the traditional academic paths of detachment, objective evaluation, and comprehensive study. They are, in the end, the contemporary expression of the questions the humane studies have always dealt with when attempting to treat the human condition. Whatever capacity higher education has to deal with large moral issues will be lost, if we force our institutions to seek local solutions to immediate problems.

We must be careful in setting out our expectations of our institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities do not exist to provide pat answers, but to engage students with vital questions. A college does not indoctrinate its students or ask their allegiance to a certain notion of beauty, a particular ethic or religion, a partisan point of view. The responsible college will seek to bring every student to formulate independently his answers to the first question in all humane investigation, a question never better framed than in the King James Bible's "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" The college has only one way of doing this. It sets its student to the answers that other men, in different times and places, have given to that question; it proposes what men have from time to time thought lovely and of good report; it examines man's efforts to deal with the problem of his humanity through his arts and sciences. But, importantly, the college does not think of its student passive before these questions and answers. It seeks his daily, continuing engagement with them, relying on its teachers to be the chief instrument of its purpose. Giving equal voice to the truths that metaphor suggests as to those proposed through scientific inquiry, the college can only urge the student to give them equal ear. It cannot require any man to construct his own world view, but it remains dedicated to providing every student that opportunity and to guarding his freedom to perform that act of synthesis independently.

Yet the college is equally pledged to the conviction that education leads to the *universally* human. The college's way of knowing gives equal weight to different and conflicting views, granting no pride of place to one mode of inquiry, one system of thought, one representation of man. The knowing that is understanding is not synonymous with the knowing that is being. To know poverty or suffering in human terms, rather than as personal problems, we must go beyond the reflex action, the intuitive, the experiential. We cannot properly understand poverty unless we scrutinize it under many spotlights, focused by the sociologist, the economist, the historian, the philosopher, the psychologist, the poet. The college's essential character is the bringing of these together and thus its emphasis must in the end be interdisciplinary. It will never wish its members to be captive to one narrow view.

It is difficult to think of a freer state than that of a student. The undergraduate can change and develop, unfettered by a particular commit-

ment to think as politician, mother, historian, banker. Liberal colleges have sought to guard this freedom for their students, putting off the day of defining through commitment until the student has had opportunity to understand himself and his culture. In the name we have given to the day of graduation, *Commencement*, we have chosen to emphasize the beginning of commitment, the student's participation henceforth in his society, his being no longer detached from it. It is also an ending, the close of a brief period when he has had opportunity, out of his study of what man has been and now is, to glimpse the better being that man might become.

It is perhaps only now, as we begin to perceive the failure of the universities, that we can fully appreciate the vital need for colleges committed to a humane view of higher education. Until now we have valued the smallness and the residential character of the colleges because these have permitted a deliberate limitation and concentration complementary to their purpose, the right to exclude what did not seem essential. But more and more it is apparent that the chief virtue to smallness is the opportunity for dialogue between teachers and students, the chief failing of the university that this dialogue has broken down.

The prime academic virtue to smallness, then, is that it provides for interaction between teacher and teacher, teacher and student, student and student. To be a member of the college is to be committed to such exchanges. It is not enough for the college professor to be tolerant of his colleague's discipline; he must be engaged responsibly with it. It is not enough for a student member to be politely acquainted with the subjects that lie outside his major interest; he must have some knowledge of them. But more than that: *It is vital that members of the college have opportunity to see whether education touches the living of their fellows.* Thus students must have continuing access to their teachers, beyond the course and beyond the year, so that they may know what carries over from a man's classroom pronouncements on one matter to his judgment on other things. A college's faculty must have members enough to deal responsibly with subject matter, but it must be kept small enough to provide frequent exchanges between teachers of different disciplines and between teachers and students. The quality of the college's life, in short, will depend altogether on the extent to which it exists as an academic *community*. Without the intellectual intimacy of a community thus understood, students will have little opportunity to discern whether the truths a man exalts in his professional statements are the truths of his life. Without the opportunity for dialogue they will receive their teachers as only propagandists. Just how crucial is the student's access to his teachers may not be wholly apparent until it is too late.

We must return undergraduate education to a first concern for the humane, if we are to have a society composed of other than soulless functionaires. In the best of all possible worlds students would not have to choose between humane education and training in useful skills. For the foreseeable future, however, our society seems likely to force the choice or, worse, to neglect the very possibility of choice. We in the colleges must seek to preserve a rich alternative. Can we do it?

The Center for the
Study of Higher Education
The University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio 43606

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